

## **Stream Stewards: A Community Stream Awareness Program**

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The Stream Stewards program, coordinated by Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG), is a 9-month workshop series designed raise awareness about local streams and the salmon in them. Based on a project developed by the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, this program's goal was to build knowledge to create inspiration and enthusiasm for salmon conservation and stream stewardship. We hoped to create a core of educated, concerned citizens who could form the framework for a community that would take ownership of our urban streams and salmon. After poking around in these little streams, it became clear that we needed a way to get folks down into the stream, getting hands and feet wet, exploring the diversity of life in these diminutive streams. Many people in our urban communities are unaware that salmon inhabit these little waterways, but once they see for themselves and learn that their everyday actions can have an impact, they can't wait to learn how to help.



*Stream Stewards tour the Nookachamps Creek watershed and learn from WDFW biologist Kurt Buchanan (far right) about the natural history of the area and implications for salmon habitat restoration.*

Beginning in March 2004, workshops were held for residents of Mount Vernon's Trumpeter Creek watershed and Sedro Woolley's Brickyard Creek watershed. After going on a watershed tour both groups met for monthly meetings featuring guest presentation by local experts. Monthly topics included: salmon life histories and habitat requirements, riparian zones, hydrology and stream processes, and benthic macroinvertebrates, to name a few. In addition to monthly meetings, the groups went on field trips to learn "in the field." In return for training, participants contribute 40 hours toward the conservation and restoration of local streams. In the past year, 19 participants have volunteered 452 hours on two stream clean ups, eight riparian planting projects, acting in an educational video, "Home Tips for Healthy Streams", and assisting with four educational programs and events. Since completion of the workshop series, some participants have become active in our stream monitoring programs, walking streams once per week October-January to identify and count spawning salmon. Not only are these volunteers learning how to protect streams in their backyards, but also they are using their new knowledge to contribute to the success of SFEG's restoration efforts all throughout the Skagit River watershed



Photo by Matt Wallis, Skagit Valley Herald

*Stream Steward Lil Cross (left) recruited classmate David Downey to assist with salmon spawner surveys. Here they measure a salmon carcass in Mount Vernon's Trumpeter Creek.*

Many participants have indicated a willingness to do more for stream conservation in their daily lives, like using fewer lawn chemicals, picking up trash along a stream, and being active in their local governments by speaking at city council meetings and contacting local elected officials about salmon and stream issues. Stream Stewards graduates have become the "keepers" of their local streams. During the 2004 spawning season we had numerous phone calls and emails from participants who were seeing salmon in their stream for the first time, and began to refer to them as "their" salmon and "their" streams. We have gotten calls when something looks a little "off" with the streams. Residents are watching every day to make sure all is well with the streams and their inhabitants.



*Stream Steward Joleen Sloniker (left) helps future Stream Stewards make salmon hats at River Awareness Day at the Children's Museum of Skagit County.*

Although the workshop series has ended for Trumpeter and Brickyard Stream Stewards, involvement is ongoing. Participants are currently helping to design and place educational signs in their watersheds, to teach other locals about their salmon streams and how to keep them healthy. At completion of the 15-month grant period, participants will be given a survey to measure their knowledge and behavior change six months after the workshops have ended.